

PBS Documentary Explores 200 Years of Deaf Life in America



Students from the St. Rita's School for the Deaf, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1918. Photograph by J.B. Schmidt. National Archives, Image: 165-WW-77E-3.

"Through Deaf Eyes," a two-hour PBS documentary exploring nearly 200 years of Deaf life in America, will air early next year. The film was inspired by the exhibition, *"History Through Deaf Eyes,"* curated by Jack R. Gannon of Gallaudet University.

The documentary will air nationally on PBS on **Wednesday, March 21 from 9 pm- 11:00 pm ET (check local listings).**

The film presents the shared experiences of American history – family life, education, work, and community connections - from the perspective of deaf citizens. Interviews include community leaders, historians, and deaf Americans with diverse views on language use, technology and identity.

Bringing a Deaf cinematic lens to the film are six artistic works by Deaf media artists and filmmakers: Wayne Betts, Renee Visco, Tracey Salaway, Kimby Caplan, Arthur Luhn, and Adrean Mangiardi.

Poignant, sometimes humorous, these films draw on the media artists' own lives and are woven throughout the documentary. But the core of the film remains the larger story of deaf life in

America -- a story of conflicts, prejudice and affirmation that reaches the heart of what it means to be human.

"We have been called deaf-mutes, mutes, objects of charity, deaf and dumb, semi-mutes, dummy, and now, hearing impaired. We have been described as 'the most misunderstood among the sons of man.' Some of us are deaf and some of us are Deaf. Some of us use American Sign Language and some of us do not. This exhibition is our untold and largely unknown history. It is American history...Through Deaf Eyes." —Jack R. Gannon, Curator

Major funding for "Through Deaf Eyes" is provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, PBS, The Annenberg Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. Private individuals have also contributed to this project. The outreach campaign is funded in part by Sign Language Associates. Outreach partners are the National Association for the Deaf, Gallaudet University, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at Rochester Institute of Technology, and California State University Northridge. As part of the campaign, numerous local organizations, some in association with their public television stations, will mount events and discussions exploring the issues raised in the film.

A comprehensive Web site, found at www.pbs.org <<http://www.pbs.org/>>, accompanies the film. The site includes interviews with the deaf filmmakers whose work is featured in the documentary, while also inviting viewers to submit their own stories, photographs, and films. These will become part of the archival collection of Gallaudet University. A companion book is also being published.

For more information check out the website: <http://depts.gallaudet.edu/deafeyes>



PBS, headquartered in Arlington, VA, is a non-profit media enterprise.

This information was compiled by MHRH staff Sue Babin.